REPORT
FROM THE
INSPECTORATE

Curriculum Area
Survey Report

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Humanities

THE
FURTHER
EDUCATION
FUNDING
COUNCIL

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The Further Education Funding Council has a legal duty to make sure further education in England is properly assessed. The FEFC's inspectorate inspects and reports on each college of further education every four years. It also assesses and reports nationally on the curriculum, disseminates good practice and gives advice to the FEFC's quality assessment committee.

Cheylesmore House
Quinton Road
Coventry CV1 2WT
Telephone 01203 863000
Fax 01203 863100

SUMMARY

The popularity of the humanities programme area continues undiminished. Enrolments rose in 1994-95 to over 930,000; 81 per cent of these enrolments were part time. Humanities is the most diverse and the largest of the 10 FEFC programme areas, comprising 28 per cent of all enrolments in the sector. A total of 90 per cent of colleges offer specific provision in humanities; the remainder offer some provision, but as elements of courses in other programme areas. A key feature of humanities is the breadth of provision in terms of its range of subjects, levels and modes of attendance. Maintaining this breadth leads to low staff-student ratios in some subjects, and increasingly some colleges are having to review their provision.

Humanities is offered in a number of forms, but is dominated by the study of single subject courses leading to GCSE or GCE A level qualifications. The highest number of enrolments is in English and communication studies, followed by social studies, modern foreign languages, history and geography. In all subjects other than geography, female students outnumber males, markedly so in modern languages. A major development in recent years has been the growth of full-time and part-time courses designed specifically for adults or for groups which have not usually participated in further education. Other trends include the increasing number of students taking humanities subjects as part of GNVQ programmes.

There is considerable variation in the structure of provision. Generally, sixth form colleges and tertiary colleges offer a wide range of GCSE and GCE A level subjects primarily for full-time students aged between 16 and 19. General further education colleges offer a similar range of subjects at a number of different levels for students, the majority of whom are over 19 years of age and part time. However, such distinctions are becoming blurred as sixth form and tertiary colleges seek to extend their provision.

Colleges are increasingly structuring provision to allow students a wide

choice of subjects and syllabuses. Greater flexibility includes the growing opportunity to mix academic and vocational studies.

Teachers in the humanities programme area are well qualified and committed to their subject specialisms. The quality of teaching is high; in 1994-95, this programme area had the highest proportion of inspection grades 1 and 2 awarded to teaching sessions in the sector. The best teachers make effective use of an appropriate range of teaching methods, underpinned by well-planned schemes of work. Classroom teaching is frequently enriched by educational visits, visiting speakers and foreign exchanges. Less satisfactory teaching is seen on some GCSE resit courses and on vocational courses. Humanities teachers provide increasingly effective induction programmes, particularly for full-time students and those embarking on GCE A level or access courses.

Within individual colleges, examination pass rates for different humanities subjects vary widely and from year to year. Some GCSE one-year full-time courses, for example, have unacceptably low pass rates, whereas levels of achievement in a number of GCE A level subjects are good. The analysis of examination results, including the reasons for variations in performance between subjects and from year to year, and the identification of appropriate action to raise standards, rarely receive sufficient attention.

Average retention rates provided by colleges for the programme area as a whole vary between 70 and 95 per cent; within that average some courses have 100 per cent retention rates, and others have rates which drop to 35 per cent or below. Drop out is often high on GCSE courses, particularly those with a wide ability range or where GCSE English is compulsory for students who do not have GCSE grade C or above. Full-time courses have a higher completion rate than part-time courses. While tutorial and subject-specific support is well established, more general skills are often inadequately addressed, particularly information technology skills.

The management of humanities in sixth form colleges is primarily through subject departments, while in tertiary and general further education colleges it is based on programmes of study or categories of student. Where structures and management are weak, staff remain isolated in their subject area, with little opportunity to share good practice or contribute to humanities strategy and development.

Quality systems have been strengthened across the sector. In sixth form colleges, quality assurance procedures have become more formal and systematic; in other sector colleges, humanities is now more fully integrated with college quality systems. Almost a third of colleges use the Advanced Level Information System to measure the value added to students' achievements; some other colleges have developed their own systems.

Humanities students are the most frequent users of college libraries. Library provision for humanities is often stronger than for other programme areas. Nevertheless, library resources in some colleges remain unsatisfactory. Equipment is generally adequate to support learning. Most teaching accommodation is fit for its purpose, neither better nor worse than that allocated to other programme areas.

Unlike other programme areas, humanities staff have few direct links with employers, and there is little provision for employers, paid for by them at full cost. The major influence on provision is the examining boards. Consultation between boards and teachers has improved steadily, and boards have become increasingly responsive to colleges' wishes. While colleges' liaison with schools for recruitment purposes is well established, curricular links are less effective. Humanities staff speak positively about the technical and vocational education initiative, now ended, which brought together school and college staff, and successfully promoted new teaching and learning styles. College links with higher education are increasingly used to develop provision. In addition to exchanges for language students, many humanities staff and students are involved in contacts and exchanges with other European countries.

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INTRODUCTION

1 This report presents an overview of humanities provision in the further education sector. It is based on inspections carried out during the college year 1994-95. As part of the quadrennial inspection programme, inspectors visited 129 of the sector's 456 colleges to inspect humanities provision. In addition to the normal pattern of inspection on such visits, a third of the inspectors provided a more detailed analysis of each teaching session. This focused mainly on teaching methods, although it was also used to gather other information, for example, about students' punctuality and the gender balance in classes. In all, 686 individual teaching sessions were analysed in this way. Inspectors also visited 51 colleges, using a questionnaire to elicit each college's view of its overall provision for humanities. Further details of these activities are given in annex A.

HUMANITIES IN FURTHER EDUCATION

Size and Scope of Provision

2 The humanities programme area is the largest and most diverse of the Further Education Funding Council's (FEFC's) 10 programme areas, comprising 28 per cent of enrolments in the sector. As well as English, history and languages, it includes subjects not always associated with humanities, such as physical education, educational technology, environmental studies, anthropology and librarianship. Annex B shows the subjects covered by the programme area.

3 In 1994-95, 409 of the sector's 456 colleges offered humanities courses and all colleges offered some humanities provision. In the more specialist colleges, it forms an element of courses in other programme areas and is not always identified separately. In 1993-94, there were approximately 915,000 enrolments in humanities, rising to 930,000 in 1994-95. By far the majority of enrolments (81 per cent) were part time. The FEFC funded 67 per cent of enrolments; the

remainder were funded from other sources, mainly local education authorities (LEAs) and the Higher Education Funding Council for England.

4 In most of the 409 colleges offering humanities courses, humanities forms a sizeable proportion of the college's work. It is the largest area of provision in 58 per cent of the general further education colleges, 76 per cent of the tertiary colleges, and 94 per cent of the sixth form colleges. In 90 per cent of the sixth form colleges, it forms more than a third of their work and in 40 per cent over half. There are very few colleges (3 per cent) where the number of enrolments in humanities falls below 100 and 62 per cent have humanities enrolments of 1,000 or more.

5 Humanities provision is dominated by the study of single subjects leading primarily to General Certificate of Education advanced level (GCE A level) and General Certificate of Secondary Education (GCSE) qualifications. In 1993-94, about two-thirds of humanities students were following a GCE A level or GCSE programme. Colleges normally have a GCE A level portfolio of at least 20 separate subjects and may offer as many as 35 subjects. Fewer subjects are available at GCSE level and there are even fewer, if any, offered for the GCE advanced supplementary (AS) qualification.

6 The second largest group of students studying humanities are on access to further education, access to higher education, or higher education courses. A growing number of humanities courses is designed specifically for adults, many of them broadly based and outside the scope of the qualifications offered by the traditional examining bodies. These include courses to help those without qualifications to progress to higher education and courses for those who want to return to study and need help in developing their skills. There is also a growing portfolio of higher education courses, franchised from universities but provided by the local further education college, for those who prefer to study close to home. Humanities provision includes a number of postgraduate professional

courses; for example, teacher training courses and language courses validated by the Institute of Linguists.

7 Humanities often contributes to vocational courses, particularly through the teaching of the core skill of communications. Students on business studies or leisure and tourism courses may include a modern foreign language in their programme of study, and health and social care students may take an additional element of sociology or psychology. Humanities is also an important element of the enrichment programmes that many colleges offer to students to enable them to broaden their studies or follow a personal interest.

8 Full-time humanities students are primarily aged between 16 and 19 although the number of adults is growing. An increasing proportion of them are students on vocational courses in other programme areas who take a GCE A level or GCSE to complement their vocational qualification, or study a humanities subject as a component of their vocational course. Of the part-time students, the vast majority are over 19 and are attending evening rather than daytime classes.

9 The highest number of humanities enrolments is in English and communication studies, followed by social sciences, modern foreign languages (French, German, Spanish and Italian in order of popularity), history and geography. Recruitment to English, modern foreign languages and social sciences is mainly female, markedly so in the case of languages, where many groups have no male students. Male students form the majority only in geography. Overall, across the sector, about 60 per cent of humanities students are female. The proportion of female students is higher in sixth form colleges than in other sector colleges, and higher in GCE A level classes than in other classes.

10 Colleges are paying increasing attention to selecting the accrediting body or course which best suits their students. They can choose between the qualifications offered by the GCSE/GCE examining boards and the more vocationally oriented qualifications offered by the

RSA Examinations Board (RSA), the City and Guilds of London Institute (C&G) and other awarding bodies. Particular syllabuses may focus on different areas of knowledge; they may also present the opportunity for preferred patterns of study and assessment, such as the breakdown of courses into modules or an increased element of assessment by coursework.

11 Opportunities for students to progress from one level of study to another in the same college are growing. Popular subjects are offered at all levels, from beginner or foundation level to higher education and in some instances, to postgraduate level.

12 Few colleges in the sector offer the complete range of humanities provision, although some of the larger general further education and tertiary colleges offer courses in the major subjects and in some minority subjects at all levels as well as providing opportunities for students to combine academic and vocational studies. Generally, sixth form colleges and tertiary colleges have a wide range of GCSE and GCE A level subjects, offered primarily to full-time students aged between 16 and 19 on a two-year programme, and taught in the daytime only, usually between 09.00 and 16.00 hours. General further education colleges offer a similarly wide range of GCSE and GCE A level subjects; their provision includes courses offered at other levels and in other subjects, teaching extends into the evening and the majority of students are over 19 and part time. However, such distinctions are becoming increasingly blurred as colleges seek to attract increased numbers of mature and part-time students.

13 Colleges offer humanities subjects and courses in almost every available mode of attendance. Students can attend full-time, part-time day or evening, one day a week, or Saturday classes. Their course can last a day, a week or several weeks, one year or two years, or even three. Students can learn through study packs, with or without tutorial support. They can attend open access centres or workshops, which hold a range of instructional materials and teaching equipment. They

can attend classes in the college, on company premises or at outreach centres such as churches, libraries, working men's clubs and community centres. They can even attend classes held on buses which visit the more remote areas or participate in breakfast classes specially designed for business people.

14 The FEFC's database for qualifications in the humanities programme area lists 4,670 separate qualifications, more than any other programme area and about a third of all qualifications currently logged. There are indications that this number is likely to increase, mainly due to the growing number of colleges seeking to accredit part-time courses or enrichment activities, in order to provide increased flexibility for students through a system of credit accumulation.

Changes in Provision

15 In most colleges, humanities provision is secure; growth of about 6 per cent on average is predicted between now and 1997. This represents the lowest anticipated rate of growth of all programme areas, although humanities is still likely to remain the largest programme area. Changes in the way in which the FEFC allocates students to programme areas, however, may result in an apparent decline in the numbers in the programme area. Until this year, the FEFC allocated all students on GCSE programmes to humanities. This has now changed. In future, students will be allocated by subject to the relevant programme area.

16 Colleges have identified potential for growth in the number of:

- adult students, particularly on part-time and access courses
- students taking GCE A level or GCSE subjects as part of a General National Vocational Qualification (GNVQ)
- young people continuing to move towards humanities subjects and away from sciences, or following a programme consisting of two humanities subjects and a science/mathematics subject, rather than three sciences.

17 However, some colleges, particularly smaller general further education and tertiary colleges, are reviewing their provision in the light of increased competition from other sector colleges or from 11 to 18 schools. As yet, it is not clear what effect increased competition is having on students' choice and the range of provision offered, but early indications are that it is leading to a redistribution or increased differentiation of provision. Where neighbouring schools or colleges offer similar programmes, particularly in minority subjects, there are instances where neither have been able to recruit viable numbers and both have withdrawn their provision. Provision is also increasingly under review where levels of achievement, for whatever reason, are not high, or where the college decides to focus its resources more strongly on vocational provision.

18 The increasing availability of GNVQ programmes is affecting recruitment to humanities. Although 30 per cent of sixth form colleges and 40 per cent of other colleges in the survey stated that GNVQ was having no discernible impact on recruitment, the remainder reported some reduction in recruitment to GCE A level programmes, to GCSE 'vocational packages', such as English, mathematics, psychology, biology and sociology for social care students, or, more frequently, to GCSE resit programmes. For the first time colleges are in a position to steer students unlikely to benefit from re-sitting GCSEs to a programme which is more appropriate to their needs, and where they may still have the opportunity to take one or two GCSEs as additional elements. Some colleges report that the reduction in humanities students is counterbalanced by a corresponding increase in the number of GNVQ and other vocational students taking a complementary GCSE or GCE A level subject, a language course or GCSE English. A small number of colleges, particularly general further education colleges, have decided to reduce the range of GCE A level and GCSE subjects on offer to full-time students, in some cases to English and mathematics only, while maintaining a wider range for part-time students. A few colleges have decided to drop their full-time GCE A level/GCSE provision altogether, offering only part-time humanities courses.

19 Across the sector as a whole, GCE AS courses remain a small element of humanities provision and the number of examination entries continues to fall. With the exception of modern languages, few colleges use GCE AS subjects for their original purpose, which was to provide greater breadth in students' programmes of study. They are typically used to meet the needs of students unlikely to manage a full GCE A level programme or to allow them to pursue a particular interest where a full GCE A level may not be available or appropriate.

20 Although the picture varies from one locality to another, there are also discernible trends in recruitment to individual subjects:

- English and communication studies continue to form the largest area of humanities provision and demand remains buoyant. There is an increasing range of qualifications and syllabuses to choose from; for example, GCE A level English language and literature, or GCE A level language only. While this has had the effect of increasing diversity and choice, it has not led to a significant increase in demand
- where modern foreign languages provision is strong within a college, both full-time and part-time provision recruits well. Future growth is seen as coming from part-time provision, from community languages such as Arabic or Urdu, or from students on vocational programmes. However, a number of colleges are finding difficulty in sustaining recruitment and are cutting the range of languages they offer. There is concern that although languages are flourishing in higher education and in schools, provision is weakening within the further education sector
- demand for sociology is declining, but it is still a popular option, particularly for part-time students and those on courses providing access to higher education
- demand for history remains substantial, especially in sixth form colleges

- economics enrolments continue to decline, having been affected by the growth in GCE A level business studies and in GNVQ provision; recruitment has fallen by a third since 1989
- geography is recovering from a drop in recruitment; it is particularly popular where the course includes an environmental element. Environmental studies is a growth area
- subjects such as classical civilisation, women's studies and philosophy, as well as minority languages such as Chinese and Dutch, are becoming increasingly popular
- psychology is still growing, as is media studies
- demand for courses in English as a foreign language (EFL) is high in those colleges that offer it. Traditional distinctions between EFL and English for speakers of other languages (ESOL) are becoming blurred because of changes in the client group; for example, English courses are increasingly taken by students from other European countries coming to work and study in this country under European Union regulations, and examinations usually taken by EFL students are now also taken by ESOL students
- there is considerable growth in demand for physical education, especially at GCE A level where it often complements GNVQ leisure and tourism, or other vocational provision. It is a popular subject, and colleges see it as increasingly important in attracting students.

21 The diversity of the programme area is seen as a strength and colleges perceive a need to maintain a breadth of provision if they are to attract the most able students. This means that colleges continue to run small groups in some subjects, against the possibility of future growth or simply to maintain a broad portfolio. Where humanities is a small element in a broader range of offerings, as in a number of the smaller general further education colleges, this position has proved harder to sustain.

ORGANISATION AND STRUCTURES

Curriculum Organisation

22 There is a growing tendency for colleges to structure provision so that students can select subjects to meet their particular interests and needs. Most now provide timetables which allow some opportunity for students to combine elements from different programmes, though the options are sometimes more theoretical than real. Combinations of GCE A level and GCSE subjects are readily made, and combinations which cross FEFC programme areas are increasingly common; for example, combining geography, psychology and biology, or mathematics, English and sociology. Some colleges have constructed a unitised and modularised curriculum, built not on curriculum areas but around the various levels of study, foundation, intermediate, advanced, to allow all full-time students the opportunity to combine academic and vocational programmes of study, as appropriate. Other colleges have found it difficult to offer a combination of GCE A levels and vocational studies.

23 It is now usual for students on vocational courses to have the option of taking GCSE mathematics or English, and GNVQ students increasingly combine their studies with relevant GCSEs or GCE A levels. This is seen as particularly important for those wishing to progress to university at a time when the general acceptability of GNVQ as an admissions qualification for higher education is being proven. Typical combinations are sociology or psychology for GNVQ advanced level health studies; communication studies for GNVQ hotel and catering; and law or economics for GNVQ business studies. Languages are increasingly crossing programme area boundaries, not just into areas such as leisure and tourism where they have a direct vocational relevance, but also into areas such as engineering and construction where students anticipate their value in enabling them to work elsewhere in Europe.

24 It is far less usual for students on GCE A level or GCSE programmes to pick up elements from vocational programmes although this is, in theory, an increasingly realistic option, given the structure and content of GNVQs. An interesting development is the small number of colleges using, or intending to use, the GNVQ core skills units to strengthen the programme they offer their GCSE or GCE A level students. There are isolated instances of GNVQ optional units replacing GCSE courses but other vocational units are rarely used. The most common gesture in the direction of vocational breadth is the opportunity for GCE A level students to take a computer literacy and information technology qualification as an additional element in a programme of study.

Taught Hours

25 The number of hours that a subject is taught reflects both the level at which it is being studied and the student's mode of attendance; in general, more time is allocated for full-time students and for advanced study. On average, each GCSE subject is taught for three hours a week and each GCE A level subject for five hours a week on full-time programmes. Full-time students taking three GCE A levels can typically expect to be timetabled for about 15 hours a week for their subject sessions, plus a tutorial hour, plus any additional activities they select from an enrichment programme. In addition, they will usually be expected to spend a further three to five hours for each subject on preparation or homework, bringing their total study time to around 30 hours a week.

26 Where individual subjects are allocated four hours or more a week, for example on GCE A level or access programmes, the teaching is frequently shared between two teachers. Where this is planned and well organised, it adds variety for both teachers and students; it enables teachers to work jointly, and share effort and good practices. Students comment adversely where they perceive little evidence of effective collaboration between staff, resulting in overlap or lack of alignment between elements of their course.

Teaching in other Programme Areas

27 Like their students, humanities staff also cross organisational boundaries. Particularly in further education or tertiary colleges, staff are likely to find themselves teaching their subjects to students on courses in other departments; for example, teaching English to business studies students or sociology on community care courses. Core elements in vocational programmes, such as communications or social sciences, are not always taught by subject specialists from humanities. Where teachers lack appropriate expertise or access to resources, the standard of work is sometimes unsatisfactory. Teachers on vocational courses rarely teach on mainstream humanities courses.

28 Humanities staff often play a key role in organising and delivering extra-curricular activities or enrichment programmes. In a number of sixth form colleges, students are given the option of converting the knowledge and skills gained through enrichment programmes into a GCE A level general studies qualification, usually by taking an additional taught element in the second year of study. This option is rarely available in general further education colleges.

Management Structures

29 College structures do not always provide adequately for the delivery and support of humanities as an entity. Because of its diversity and the large number of subjects offered at different levels of study, institutions have not found it easy to devise an effective management structure.

30 In most sixth form colleges, the management unit is the individual subject; each subject forms its own department. This often works well, particularly for the larger subject areas such as English where there are several members of staff, or where individual subjects are further organised into appropriate clusters, sometimes called schools or faculties. However, this subject focus can lead to fragmentation of provision, duplication of effort, or professional or personal isolation, particularly where a subject is taught by only one member of staff.

31 Larger colleges have adopted various other management structures including:

- a single department or faculty of humanities
- departments formed from groups of related humanities subjects, such as modern languages, or from humanities subjects grouped with vocational areas, such as English, communications and creative arts or leisure, tourism and modern languages. Most groupings have a curricular rationale; others, for example a department of mathematics and modern languages, exist for historical reasons or are created with an eye to administrative convenience rather than academic coherence or team identity
- departments built around programmes of study; for example, a GCE A level department, a foundation studies department or a department of access studies. Such structures have the advantage that they mirror the basis on which most students have organised their programmes and so encourage a strong team spirit. The disadvantages are that staff generally teach on more than one programme of study, and the range of subjects covered by a programme of study is wide, making the sharing of good practice difficult
- a matrix management structure, increasingly adopted in general further education and tertiary colleges, which allows a mainly programme-focused approach to be complemented by cross-college responsibilities for particular subjects. Where roles and responsibilities are clearly understood, this approach is a successful one, encouraging good team work whilst retaining an appropriate focus on the subject and its development
- a sixth form centre, set up in tertiary or general further education colleges to cater for the particular needs of the GCE A level student. Currently small in number, the model is creating interest as a means of attracting students from neighbouring sixth form colleges or schools with sixth forms.

32 As servicing roles increase, humanities staff find themselves working more and more in other departments or faculties, and frequently on more than one site. While this brings with it the bonus of different ways of working, it is often difficult to manage effectively; for example, where meeting times clash and staff are members of more than one course team, as can frequently be the case.

33 Where colleges have been able to establish effective structures, these provide a framework for consultation, co-ordination, planning, setting of targets, and delegation of responsibilities. Subject development is dynamic and given high priority; there is consistency in practice, supported by formal and informal procedures; and there is a positive open environment for the exchange of ideas and development. Managers lead by example and there is a good team spirit.

CLASSROOM EXPERIENCE

34 The humanities programme area continues to offer some of the most effective teaching in the sector. Almost 4,000 sessions were observed during college inspections in 1994-95. The percentage of sessions in relation to the grade awarded by inspectors is shown in table 1.

Table 1. Inspection grades awarded for humanities provision

Inspection Grade	*1*	*2*	*3*	*4*	*5*
Percentage of sessions	23	44	26	6	1

A total of 67 per cent of sessions were considered to have strengths which outweighed weaknesses; only 7 per cent had weaknesses which outweighed strengths. A comparison of humanities grades with the grades awarded in other programme areas is shown in annex C.

Teaching Methods

35 A characteristic of the sessions observed by inspectors was the number of different teaching methods used. Detailed analysis of 686 sessions provides information on the frequency with which different

methods of teaching occurred in classes (annex D). Humanities teachers make considerable use of question and answer techniques (observed in 86 per cent of sessions). Other strong features include: work related to handouts prepared by the teacher (72 per cent); use of the blackboard or whiteboard (72 per cent); and lecturing or talking to the class (70 per cent). Group work was observed in 40 per cent of sessions and students working in pairs in 30 per cent. The profile of the teaching methods used within a session was remarkably consistent across the programme area. The significant exception was in modern languages, including English as a foreign language, where there was more use of role-play and work in pairs, more use of question and answer activity and less lecturing or talking to the class.

36 Schemes of work show a significant improvement over the previous year's inspections. They were available for 76 per cent of sessions observed during 1994-95, though only 32 per cent of teachers went on to share them with students. Increasingly, schemes of work provide an effective framework for sequencing learning, checking the variety and appropriateness of teaching methods, ensuring the coverage of the syllabus including core skills, and appropriately phasing assignments. However, a small minority of schemes are still little more than extracts from the relevant part of the syllabus and too many lessons plans are simply a list of topics for the session.

Exceptionally good use is made of schemes of work for the GCE A level English programme in one tertiary college. They show the sequence of texts or critical piece to be studied; the literary content; the study skills; and the tasks/learning assessments, with dates for each activity. Staff are provided with a checklist for recording the literary forms and study skills to be covered by each part of the scheme of work.

Classroom Practice

37 In good sessions, teachers are well prepared; they have mastery of their materials and show commitment to their subjects and their students. Classroom management skills are high; there is little evidence of disruptive or disaffected students. Staff have high expectations of their students, irrespective of the level of work. The aims and the structure of the sessions are shared with students. Teachers provide explicit links with previous sessions to set the context and reinforce prior learning. Similarly they allow sufficient time to consolidate learning at the end of the session and indicate the direction of future work.

38 In the better sessions, the teaching is lively. The topics selected and the work set are imaginative. Contact time is used to good effect; for example, it is not spent on work that could equally well be done as homework or covered in a handout which the student could tackle alone. Discussion and questioning are sufficiently open to stimulate responses, but clear enough to develop learning and to enable teachers to check students' understanding. Work is conducted at an appropriate pace, generated by the range of activity, interactions and tasks. Within a teaching session, the size and composition of the learning groups are appropriately varied, bringing in individual work, one-to-one interaction between student and teacher, students working in pairs, small group work and whole class work. Tasks are relevant, clearly explained and suitably varied to cater for the needs of students who have differing levels of ability or experience.

One group of tertiary college students 'translated' a section of *The Merchant of Venice* into Scouse, and related the events, tensions and interactions to characters in Brookside. The piece was then acted to the rest of the class. It demonstrated vividly how the issues in Shakespeare's play are equally relevant today.

In one sixth form college sociology class, students were given a range of tasks to choose from, some of which were relatively straightforward, while others presented greater challenges. The implications of each task were fully discussed, and then each student was invited to choose a task which they would find achievable but challenging. The teacher was prepared to negotiate further with individuals, if required.

39 Good teachers seize opportunities to encourage students to develop their own insights and learn in a real context. In psychology, for example, the techniques of research and statistical analysis are developed in relation to the students' own investigative work rather than taught as separate topics in the abstract. Students are expected to do much of the work for themselves; they are asked to prepare inputs and present them to the class, to use their own experience and express their own views. Staff try to steer them away from the anecdotal or the superficial. In modern foreign language lessons, much of the teaching is conducted in the language being studied. It is used almost all the time in GCE A level lessons and substantially even at beginners level.

In a sixth form college, a group of second year GCE A level Spanish students, supported by the language assistant, prepared and presented a tape/slide presentation on the work of a Spanish writer. They drew on their analysis of poems and short stories, prepared a commentary in Spanish, chose appropriate music and images to suit the mood of the poems, and presented their programme to fellow students.

40 Less successful sessions show little evidence of effective planning; the pace of the work is often too slow to hold students' attention and tasks are insufficiently challenging. Teachers have low expectations; they are satisfied with monosyllabic responses, and do not check the

extent to which students are learning from what they are doing. Some teachers spoonfeed the students and do too much of the work themselves. Their students have come to expect it and are ready to complain, for example, when notes are not dictated or written on the board for them to copy. Discussions or question and answer sessions are poorly managed and generate little response; articulate or troublesome students are allowed to dominate. Sometimes there is little appropriate change of activity; sometimes the changes are so frequent and frenetic that there is little chance of sustained learning. Time is not always used to best effect. Tasks are rarely differentiated, and the needs of weaker or more able students are not met effectively. Less than a quarter of the sessions observed included the differentiated activities necessary to cope with the widening spread of ability found in many classes.

In one of the lessons observed in a general further education college, almost two-thirds of the time was spent on dictation of notes by the teacher. Three breaks in dictation were observed, and these were used by the teacher to initiate discussion. However, the discussion was superficial and tended to be dominated by two students. It did not reach any conclusions, nor did it seem that the teacher expected it to.

One sixth form college teacher's idea of a question and answer session was to get the students to guess the answer she had in mind. No acknowledgement was given for 'incorrect' answers and, when the guessing was wildly inaccurate, the teacher mimed a clue. This GCSE modern language session produced a lot of confusion and not much learning.

41 Much of the teaching and learning in humanities subjects is supported by good study guides or handbooks. Handouts are increasingly professional in appearance and content, and there is growing use of interesting authentic and topical materials. Colleges are making more use of learning packages which allow students to work on their own at their own pace. There is scope to extend their use much further.

Overall, teachers have a tendency to rely too much on speech and text and to make too little appropriate use of audio-visual aids. Such aids were used in only 18 per cent of the sessions analysed and the use of overhead projectors was practically non-existent (3 per cent of sessions). Information technology was integral to the work in only 2 per cent of the sessions analysed; too often it was seen simply as a facility for wordprocessing assignments. However, there were some noteworthy examples of good practice and growing signs that students are being encouraged to use compact disk read-only memory (CD-ROM) databases to support research for assignments and presentations. More attention should be given to making effective use of these valuable learning resources.

A sixth form college geography lesson was particularly well crafted. A range of teaching aids was used to examine the effects of technological change on the human environment. A brief introduction, setting out the context, was followed by an edited video programme. Discussion was structured around a question sheet based on the video. After a period of individual work, the teacher used students' responses, the chalkboard, further handouts and the overhead projector to take the discussion further and consolidate learning.

In one general further education college, the quality of the teacher-produced materials used in the law classes was extremely high. The teachers had produced their own study guides, which were attractively wordprocessed and formed the basis for the course. Students were extremely appreciative of these materials which helped them to overcome the impenetrable nature of many of their textbooks.

42 The inspection grades awarded to individual sessions were higher in some curriculum areas than in others; for example, English as a foreign language, history and access course sessions had more than 75 per cent grades 1 and 2, compared with 63 per cent for

sociology and psychology. Inspection grades were also higher for some types of provision; access sessions gained good grades, as did much of the GCE A level work. Sixth form college grades were generally higher than those in other colleges. GCSE sessions were generally awarded lower inspection grades; students often lacked motivation and were struggling with their work. Some lessons for vocational students also received low grades. This was particularly true where teachers had given insufficient attention to ensuring that the content of lessons was relevant to, and the methods of learning consistent with, students' experience in the vocational areas in which their main programmes were based.

A vocational language class in a sixth form college had only three students. The lesson plan and accompanying materials were good. However, no attempt had been made to make the material vocationally relevant and the students were unable to complete the most elementary linguistic tasks without constant help from the teacher; they could remember almost no relevant vocabulary, were unable to use the most basic question formulation and produced unrecognisable language in terms of pronunciation, accent and intonation. The class had started three months earlier with 14 students.

43 Learning is frequently enriched by relevant visits, speakers and work experience. In some colleges, English students benefit from writers in residence; they visit live productions and attend or deliver poetry readings. History students visit relevant sites. There is fieldwork in geography and sometimes in sociology. Communications students benefit from work placements with local newspapers.

The visit of Jackie Kay, the black Glaswegian poet, during poetry week at a sixth form college, provided the students and staff with the opportunity to discuss race and gender issues against the background of a generous, racy reading of fine poems by the poet.

Students of government and politics at a general further education college effectively link work experience with class-based learning. This can either be working for a day in the House of Commons with the local member of parliament or shadowing a local councillor. The experience is then used to support a role-play in a formal debate planned by students on their return. The total experience successfully consolidates and extends theoretical learning.

44 Overall, the assignments that are set are appropriate. Sometimes they are imaginative, drawing effectively on students' own experiences and a variety of cultural and educational backgrounds. In the best practice, timetables for assignments are issued at the start of a course, and the criteria for assessment are shared with students and linked to the criteria used by examining bodies. A frequent comment from full-time students is that humanities staff fail to co-ordinate homework assignments and that, consequently, there are considerable peaks and troughs in workloads for individual students. In none of the general further education colleges was there an interdisciplinary timetable for GCE A levels or GCSE programmes which would allow students to schedule their work across the range of subjects being studied. On access programmes, co-ordination of the setting, marking and scheduling of assignments is much more effective.

45 The quality of marking varies but is improving. Most work is returned to students within the timescales agreed, usually seven to 14 days. At its best, marking is detailed, encouraging but realistic; it offers high-quality guidance for improvement. At its worst, it is superficial, even ambiguous. Sometimes there is too much reliance on oral comments when the work is handed back to students; while this eases the load on staff, it is considerably less useful for students' later reference. Occasionally, the marking is not rigorous enough; staff place the emphasis on support and reinforcement, and are not sufficiently explicit about the required standards.

46 The criteria used by examining bodies are not always applied in internal marking. This is a particular problem in social sciences. Marking is generally accurate, though there were occasional examples of inconsistency within subjects and colleges. Little effective use is made of self-assessment or assessment by fellow students. About a third of colleges say that they have marking policies for the college as a whole; about the same number have departmental policies; others say that policies are under development. Policies on marking exist at subject level primarily where examination boards require a particular approach and insist on double marking for standardisation. Typical of this is English coursework. Other examples are found in sociology and psychology. As yet, the quality of marking within the programme area is not sufficiently consistent.

STUDENTS' ACHIEVEMENTS

Students' Attitudes to their Courses

47 Students say that staff are concerned for their progress and well-being, that teaching is generally effective and stimulating and that they find their subjects enjoyable. The most usual cause for complaint is the workload; students frequently comment that they were unprepared for the work they are expected to undertake outside their timetabled hours. For part-time students and those with part-time jobs or family responsibilities, this can prove a considerable problem. However, school leavers are often equally ill-prepared for the increase in quantity and level of work required for GCE A level study. Colleges should give more thought to increasing students' awareness of the time required for successful study and allocate more time to help students develop their own strategies for coping with their work.

48 Adult students express the highest degree of satisfaction with their courses, particularly adults on access courses. They especially appreciate the personal support they receive from staff, and the extent to which attempts are made to address their particular needs and

interests. They often contrast their experiences positively with their previous experiences of education. GCE A level students comment favourably on the greater levels of independence and autonomy that attendance at college gives them; they perceive that colleges provide a more adult learning environment, and that they enjoy a more relaxed relationship with their teachers. However, some adults, particularly those attending part-time evening classes, find the range of abilities within a class daunting or frustrating, depending on whether they themselves are beginners or more advanced learners. The least satisfied group of students are those on GCSE resit programmes, who are often there because no alternative was offered. There are indications that the increasing availability of GNVQ intermediate provision is providing more appropriate courses of study, and increasing the levels of motivation for these students.

Acquisition of Skills

49 Students' responses are generally appropriate to the level of study. Many students are highly capable, and there are instances where the quality of individual achievement outstrips the quality of the input from staff. Contributions in class are often reflective and measured. Students can be diligent in following through a train of thought, or in pursuing a point they have not fully understood or with which they disagree. Many students, particularly adult students, are highly articulate. The only significant exceptions to these generalisations are found among students on some GCSE resit programmes and in some modern language classes, where school leavers lack the confidence to express themselves in the language being studied.

50 Skills of self-directed learning and private study are not always adequately fostered. When they are, the results are often good.

In an enterprising language exchange scheme run by a general further education college, an English as a foreign language student is paired with a student of his/her own native tongue for one hour a week. The teacher provides prompts for discussion, and half an hour is spent in each language. The pairs use the time profitably to extend their language skills but also in getting to know each other and the different cultures and backgrounds. Firm friendships often develop as a result.

After each lesson on the GCE A level history course in one sixth form college, a short reading homework is set, usually based on historical documents. Students evidently do this conscientiously and as a result are able to play an active part at the beginning of the next lesson when the teacher sets out the links with the previous session and the objectives for this one. The students provide detailed and thoughtful responses, demonstrating and consolidating their newly-acquired subject knowledge and making use of their well-developed oral skills.

51 The more effective sessions provide students with the opportunity to develop higher order skills such as interpretation, evaluation, comparison and analysis as well as knowledge and understanding.

The teacher on a language teacher training course at a general further education college gave a demonstration lesson on the need to contextualise language rather than teach it in the abstract. The students were his 'class' and he used a variety of aids. The students then had to recall each step in the lesson and explore the reasoning behind the sequencing, the presentation, alternatives and pitfalls. They produced an excellent analysis. Students learned a great deal about effective ways of supporting language acquisition.

52 Despite greater awareness of the importance of more general skills such as communication and information technology, there is still a tendency to address them only at the start of a course as part of

induction and not to continue their development in an integrated way. However, there are increasing instances of good practice, where these skills are developed systematically and their acquisition recorded.

A GCE A level history class in a sixth form college used a handout to discuss the relative significance of economic and religious causes of the Peasants' War. This was followed by setting up two debating teams, one side arguing the case for economic causes, the other for religious causes. Afterwards, students commented on the debate. The teacher carried out an effective debrief, summarising the subject-specific issues, then going on to give equal emphasis to the skills of presenting an argument and of active listening.

In each lesson observed, there was an emphasis on developing specific general skills within the context of the subject matter under consideration. A group task involved decision-making exercises, which were designed to include every student. The debriefing from these exercises was skilfully led by the teacher. It included discussion on the transferability of these skills to other aspects of students' programmes of study.

53 Students' files of work vary considerably in their quality and relevance. Where attention has been given to helping students develop appropriate note-taking and organisational skills, files are often impressive and a valuable aid to learning. However, students are frequently left to their own devices; sometimes files are never seen by staff.

A student in an economics class in a general further education college had completed an excellent set of notes, supplemented by other resources. The notes were comprehensive, well organised, and accompanied by relevant and accurate graphs and statistics. The other students in the group also achieved a good standard in their course folders.

In one sixth form college, a second-year student's file consisted of a cardboard wallet in which he had collected whatever came his way; dictated notes, complete and incomplete exercises, essays, handouts and doodles. He had made no attempt to classify or date the papers and, when asked, was unable to explain the significance of many of them.

Achievement in External Examinations

54 A total of 80 per cent of GCSE humanities students in the sector are in general further education and tertiary colleges, the remainder in sixth form colleges. This reflects the smaller number of sixth form colleges and the large proportion of mature students who take GCSEs: 36 per cent of the total. Nearly half of all GCSE students take humanities subjects; they represent 40 per cent of entries in sixth form colleges and 47 per cent in other colleges.

55 Although numbers are lower, levels of achievement in sixth form colleges are about 10 per cent higher than those in other sector colleges and slightly higher than those reached by 16 to 18-year-old pupils in schools. A comparison of grades achieved, A to G and A to C, by type of institution is given in table 2. Much of the difference in achievement levels can be accounted for by the differing spread of abilities in the various institutions.

Table 2. Analysis of GCSE examination results by type of college, 1994

Establishment type/age of student	*Percentage gaining grades A to C*	*Percentage gaining grades A to G*
Sixth form college/16 to 18	49	93
Other further education colleges/16 to 18	38	83
Schools/under 16	52	96
Schools/16 to 18	45	92

Source: Department for Education and Employment

56 There is little variation in grades achieved between each of the major GCSE subjects (subjects with sector entries of 2,000 and over): the range is 92 to 96 per cent for sixth form colleges and 81 to 86 per cent for other sector colleges. Differences between subjects in the proportion of candidates gaining grades A to C are more marked. For sixth form college students, it runs from 42 per cent in history to 63 per cent in communications. For other colleges, the range is from 28 per cent in history to 53 per cent in communications.

57 No statistics are available for mature students taking GCSEs in sixth form colleges, as the numbers in this category are relatively small. For other sector colleges, the overall achievement rate of grades A to G for mature students (82 per cent in 1994) and 16 to 18 year olds (83 per cent) is similar. However, 60 per cent of mature students gained grades A to C compared with 38 per cent of younger students, which may reflect the greater experience and stronger motivation of mature students.

58 At GCE A level, there is a similar difference in performance between students at sixth form colleges and those at other sector colleges. In 1994, the overall pass rate for GCE A level students aged 18 in sixth form colleges was 83 per cent and the proportion of students gaining grades A to C was 48 per cent; the comparable figures for other sector colleges were 72 per cent and 37 per cent respectively. Again, these figures reflect levels of achievement at entry; students with higher levels of achievement tend to stay on in sixth forms or to move to sixth form colleges rather than general further education or tertiary colleges.

59 Performance varies between GCE A level subjects as it does at GCSE. Sometimes comparatively low levels of achievement are seen as reflecting the degree of difficulty of the subject: for example, modern foreign languages are usually regarded as demanding subjects. Sometimes low levels of achievement reflect the amount of teaching time allocated; for example, general studies, which is often used as an umbrella qualification for a number of enrichment activities, may only

be taught for one hour a week, if that. In 1994, overall pass rates for major subjects in sixth form colleges ranged from an average of 77 per cent for general studies and 78 per cent for geography to 90 per cent for English. In other sector colleges, the range was from 64 per cent in social science subjects to 82 per cent for English. The proportion of those gaining grades A to C follows the same general pattern; in sixth form colleges it rises from 40 per cent in general studies and 43 per cent in geography to 52 per cent in English and in other sector colleges from 31 per cent in economics to 42 per cent in English.

60 Whereas mature students do better in GCSE examinations, the opposite is true at GCE A level. The overall pass rate in 1994 for students aged 19 or over in general further education and tertiary colleges was 62 per cent. This compares with a pass rate of 72 per cent for students aged 16 to 18. In sixth form colleges, students aged 19 or over achieved a pass rate of 68 per cent compared with 83 per cent for 16 to 18 year olds. There is a similar difference in the numbers of students gaining grades A to C. This may reflect the step change in difficulty that GCE A level represents for many mature students and the fact that the statistics include weaker retake candidates.

61 Pass rates in GCE AS subjects are 10 to 15 per cent below the GCE A level pass rate for each subject, reflecting the sector's use of GCE AS subjects to meet the needs of students likely to experience difficulty with GCE A levels.

62 While overall levels of achievement at GCE A level have risen by 1 or 2 per cent for the last three years, there have been considerable fluctuations in subject results, from year to year. At national level, for example, pass rates for general studies at GCE A level rose by 10 per cent between 1993 and 1994. Such fluctuations occur more frequently at college level, particularly where student numbers are low. In one college, the pass rates for GCE A level geography in 1994 was 13 per cent down on the

previous year, while the pass rate for French rose by 9 per cent. The reasons for these inconsistencies in examination performance can sometimes be attributed to external influences such as changes in partner school provision or to internal influences such as changes in staffing or new syllabuses. In many cases, the precise reason is unknown and there is little real attempt to investigate. Poor results are too often attributed to 'a poor year'.

63 There is no evidence to suggest that standards in humanities have fallen over the past 20 years, despite the large increase in participation rates and in the range of students taking humanities courses. Standards in the sector remain high. Colleges have introduced new subjects and developed new provision, such as access and GNVQs, so that students' needs and abilities can be catered for more effectively. The content and emphasis of existing subjects have also changed. In speaking and in writing, modern foreign language students are now required to make more use of the language they are studying and to be more aware of current issues and concerns. In sociology, the emphasis has shifted away from theory and towards the acquisition of higher order skills, such as interpretation and analysis. The newly-introduced GCE A level English language course is demanding in terms of the linguistic concepts students are required to handle and the variety of skills they have to master.

Punctuality and Attendance

64 In 58 per cent of sessions inspected, punctuality was good; it was judged poor in only 10 per cent. Students in sixth form colleges were markedly better at arriving for lessons on time than in general further education or tertiary colleges. This may relate to the organisation of the timetable and to the greater use of bells in sixth form colleges or the fact that fewer sixth form colleges have dispersed sites.

65 In the humanities sessions inspected, the average number of students attending was 10, compared with an average of 13 on the register. Average attendance in sociology was 36 per cent compared

with 70 per cent for English, 76 per cent for modern foreign languages and 92 per cent for geography.

66 In most cases, the monitoring of attendance is increasingly effective. There are regular reports, college guidelines and systems, and contact with students who are persistent absentees. Action to improve retention and attendance features frequently on agendas in end-of-term reviews. The process is still poorly managed in a small minority of colleges; sometimes definitions of what constitutes an acceptable level of attendance, or procedures for following up persistent absence, are not well understood, and policies and procedures are not always implemented.

67 Information on attendance is usually provided for the college's management information system, but there is considerable variation in the efficiency and effectiveness of these systems. In some cases, the system is not designed to provide information at subject level, and staff keep their own records and carry out their own analyses.

Retention Rates

68 Colleges adopt different approaches to the monitoring of retention and completion rates. In most sixth form colleges and over half the other colleges, monitoring is carried out at subject level. In the remaining colleges, it is at course or section level; for example, it involves all access course students or all GCSE students. In the best practice, information is collected and reported at both subject and course or section levels.

69 Information on the programme area as a whole is more commonly available in sixth form colleges than in other colleges. Retention rates range between 80 and 95 per cent for sixth form colleges and between 70 and 85 per cent for other colleges. Generally, full-time students have higher completion rates than part-time students. The retention rate, that is, the numbers still attending compared with the numbers at the start of the course, is on average 85

per cent for the English sessions inspected, 86 per cent for modern foreign languages, 91 per cent for sociology, and 97 per cent for geography. English literature has a high retention rate of 94 per cent compared with English language (81 per cent). English language has the lowest rate in this programme area, which undoubtedly reflects the 'compulsory' nature of GCSE English for many full-time students. Retention rates vary between different levels of study and different student groups; in the colleges in the survey, retention rates for GCSE programmes as a whole ranged from 35 to 75 per cent compared with 50 to 90 per cent for GCE A levels. Programmes at higher levels, and those recruiting mainly adults, often have much higher retention rates.

70 There is some evidence that the drop-out rate from subjects taken as additional elements by vocational students can be high, particularly where the additional studies are compulsory, as is often the case with GCSE or GCE A level English. Students comment on a perceived or actual lack of vocational relevance. It may also reflect dissatisfaction with the more formal styles of learning; those taking a GCE A level or GCSE as an additional element often compare their learning experiences in these classes unfavourably with the styles of teaching and learning they experience on their GNVQ course.

Destinations

71 In the past, many of the systems for collecting data on destinations for humanities students relied primarily on informal personal contacts; the information gathered was not always collected centrally or used effectively. The approach is now increasingly rigorous, although the emphasis is still upon students' progression to higher education. Insufficient attention is paid to the destinations of students on GCSE courses or of those moving into employment. The majority of full-time humanities students taking GCE A levels meet their primary goal, which is to progress to higher education; proportions quoted by the colleges range from 50 to 85 per cent. Overall, there has been a steady increase in the numbers of

humanities students entering higher education. The majority of mature students who successfully complete an access course progress to local universities with which their colleges have agreements. There is a growing trend for younger students to attend universities within the locality. The majority of GCSE students stay on in further education, usually, though not always, at the same college.

QUALITY SYSTEMS

72 In the past, humanities provision in some general further education and tertiary colleges was not included in the college quality system; staff did not see its relevance because college systems were primarily course based and humanities provision primarily focused on the subject. In the majority of colleges, humanities is now fully integrated within the quality assurance system and subject-based review is an essential part of the quality procedures for humanities.

73 In sixth form colleges, quality assurance procedures were based mainly on the department and subject, and focused almost entirely on examination results and examiners' reports. In many cases, these procedures have now been significantly extended to include course review and to take greater account of students' opinions.

74 GCE A level programmes are well placed to make use of systems that identify the value added to students' achievements by comparing a student's level of achievement at GCSE on entry to college with the qualifications gained at the end of the course. In 1994, 132 sector colleges made use of the GCE Advanced Level Information System which provides comparative data on the value added for each subject in the individual college and nationwide. A number of colleges have preferred to devise a system of their own, either individually or working in a group. Data from these systems are used not only for reviewing examination performance, but increasingly to inform the guidance given to students, at the point of recruitment and subsequently during a course, about the likelihood of success. With the

advent of GNVQs and the requirement for more effective guidance for students, identification of the value added to achievement will become increasingly important.

75 Across the sector, there is growing use of performance indicators in a programme area not previously noted for its formal quantitative approach to quality. Such indicators are frequently aggregated to college or departmental level rather than dealt with at subject level, sometimes in a deliberate attempt to avoid unhelpful or invidious comparisons. Analysis is not always sufficiently searching or translated into action. It is worth noting that many staff, particularly those teaching sociology and psychology, undertake their own analyses often at a more sophisticated level than that undertaken by the college. Such work is sometimes carried out by students themselves as part of their learning programme.

76 Use of student questionnaires is now almost universal. Students' opinions about their courses have led to useful outcomes. These typically include changes in syllabus, shortening of lengthy sessions, changes in teaching approaches such as a reduction in the amount of time spent in making notes, improved study facilities, the introduction of holiday revision courses and earlier ordering of text and reference books.

FUNDING AND RESOURCES

Funding Arrangements

77 Because humanities is largely classroom based and has limited requirements for specialist equipment, the FEFC has taken the humanities programme area as its baseline for funding. This means that it attracts the lowest level of funding in the funding methodology. Staff teaching in some of its component curriculum areas, most notably modern foreign languages, believe the level of funding fails to take sufficient account of the smaller class sizes and higher level of specialist equipment required to ensure adequate teaching and learning.

78 In addition, the lower level of funding encourages some colleges to look for additional efficiency gains. Colleges of all types are considering whether teaching hours can be reduced or whether students can spend more time working on their own, using resources structured by the teacher. A number of colleges is reducing the taught hours for each subject by one or even two hours a week and replacing these by directed time, during which students are sent to work on a specific task in a learning centre or library where support by staff and relevant resource materials are at hand. This form of provision is relatively new to humanities. There is a growing number of examples of good practice. There is also evidence that work carried out by students studying on their own, using materials or resources designed for that purpose, is unsuccessful where it is not integral to the learning programme. Where the work is treated as an optional extra, or where students are simply pointed towards the library and left to their own devices, such activity loses much of its value.

79 Colleges are also seeking to improve their cost effectiveness by increasing class size. In some colleges, increases have been sought in subjects such as English or sociology, but not in others, such as modern languages, where numbers are small and where larger numbers may be seen as detrimental to learning. A few colleges have sought to increase class sizes across the board, for example, from 12 to 16 for all part-time humanities classes, or, in at least one instance, from 20 to 25 students for first-year GCE A level programmes. It is too early to say what impact this will have on students' achievement, although an increasing number of groups contain such a wide span of ability, prior experience and achievement that it is difficult for teachers to meet the needs of all students. It is not uncommon to find part-time groups that contain beginners, students about to take GCSE and students retaking a course having completed it unsuccessfully the previous year.

Staffing

80 The humanities programme area benefits considerably from teaching staff who are highly qualified in their subject disciplines. Between 90 and 95 per cent of teachers have a first degree in their main teaching subject. In a third of general further education and tertiary colleges and three-quarters of sixth form colleges, this figure rises to 100 per cent. A significant proportion of humanities teachers hold further degrees. On average, the proportion is 35 per cent, rising to 40 per cent in a third of colleges and 50 per cent in some sixth form colleges.

81 Teachers are also well qualified professionally. Current figures show that over 85 per cent have teaching qualifications; in four out of five colleges this rises to 90 per cent. In approximately one in 10 general further education colleges and almost half the sixth form colleges, all humanities staff have a teaching qualification. Not unexpectedly, the proportion of staff holding training and development lead body assessor awards, qualifying them to assess or verify vocational qualifications, is much lower. Currently about 20 per cent of humanities staff teaching on GNVQ provision hold an award, though the proportion is significantly higher in general education colleges than in sixth form colleges. In almost all cases where staff have a substantial teaching commitment to GNVQ, they are in the process of gaining the awards or appropriate training is planned. A substantial proportion of humanities teachers are examiners or chief examiners for relevant boards, or active members of subject associations. Some teachers are also current practitioners in their area of expertise. For example, in one sixth form college, five of the six full-time English teachers are practising writers, and students undoubtedly benefit from the experience they bring to their teaching.

82 Few teachers in this programme area have recent experience in industry or commerce, or seek such experience. In three out of five general further education and tertiary colleges and four out of five sixth form colleges, no humanities teachers have recent industrial or

commercial experience. Staff in sixth form colleges tend to make more use of work placements, often through the teacher placement services run by training and enterprise councils (TECs). Colleges should find ways of encouraging staff to obtain relevant experience, particularly those teaching on GNVQ courses or on courses such as law or communications where there is an obvious link to the world of work. Experience outside the world of education is also important if staff are to give accurate guidance and advice on subject choices and careers.

83 Nearly half the colleges report some difficulties in recruiting appropriate staff, notably for modern languages, psychology and law. Reasons given for these difficulties include applicants' lack of relevant expertise and the increasingly competitive rates of pay in schools. The advent of GNVQ has not as yet had a significant impact on levels of staffing, though there is some evidence that some staff teaching GCSE subjects have been redeployed to other programme areas when GCSE programmes have failed to recruit.

84 On average, just over 30 per cent of humanities teaching is undertaken by part-time teachers. The proportion ranges from a high of 45 per cent in a few tertiary or general further education colleges to less than 5 per cent in some sixth form colleges. The proportion of part-time humanities teachers in general further education and tertiary colleges (an average of 36 per cent) is higher than in sixth form colleges where the average is 16 per cent. Modern foreign languages traditionally recruits high numbers of part-time teachers to enable colleges to provide an appropriate range of languages and to meet changes in demand. In too many instances, however, one or two full-time members of staff are left to support 15 or more part-time teachers. In a few instances there is no full-time specialist member of staff to lead the curriculum area and this creates problems for staff support as well as for curriculum management and development.

85 The effectiveness of the support given to part-time teachers varies considerably, though it is improving. In the best practice, part-time teachers benefit from a programme of induction, provision of all

relevant documentation, additional support for new teachers, payment to attend meetings and staff development. One in three colleges offers some or all of these elements of good practice. In the worst cases, part-time teachers are isolated, lack co-ordination or access to facilities and are obliged to operate independently without effective guidance or support.

86 There is some evidence that inspection grades awarded to the humanities sessions taught by part-time teachers are not as high as those awarded to sessions taught by full-time members of staff. There are a number of reasons for this. As well as lacking effective support, part-time teachers may be working with less motivated or less able students who sometimes present a greater challenge for teachers. Part-time staff often teach part-time classes, which occasionally fall outside a college's quality assurance system or are treated with less rigour than other provision. Many colleges pay insufficient attention to the quality of the part-time teachers they employ and the support they need.

87 Technician support allocated solely to humanities provision is the exception rather than the rule; teachers rely on college-wide services to provide the technical support they need, mainly audio-visual aids for teaching. The only curriculum area consistently identifying the need for additional support is modern foreign languages, where the increasing use of technology makes considerable demands on both teachers' and technicians' time. Humanities teachers make extensive use of colleges' reprographic services and, where it is available, secretarial time. While most staff would welcome an increase in the level of support they receive, it is not an issue of major concern for most humanities providers.

Equipment

88 Many humanities subjects do not require specialist equipment and those that do generally have levels of equipment which are adequate to support learning. Textbooks are provided free to over 75

per cent of full-time students. Some also receive dictionaries and other supporting books; for example, history students in one college are given up to 10 books each for their GCE A level course. Almost all part-time students are expected to buy their own books and staff frequently prepare handouts and photocopies to keep their costs down.

89 Hardware used by staff includes overhead projectors, audio and video players, classroom computers and CD-ROMs. A majority of colleges support language learning with specialist facilities such as language laboratories, individual video stations and satellite links; these are not always functioning effectively or fully used. Some colleges have audio-visual equipment, including video facilities, in the majority of teaching rooms but the audio-visual aids trolley is a more common sight. In a fifth of humanities provision, staff report that the level of equipment is inadequate. This relates primarily to out-of-date or insufficient information technology equipment and/or specialist software packages for humanities subjects. In a number of colleges, the teaching of psychology is hampered by inadequate provision of equipment for experiments.

90 Students of humanities are the most demanding users of college libraries and traditional learning resources such as books and journals. The quality of students' work can be significantly affected by a library's strength or weakness. Although the quality of library provision varies nationally, and does not always meet students' needs, humanities subjects are often among the areas best provided for. In some colleges, links between teaching and library or resource centre staff are inadequate. In others, the library staff attend curriculum area meetings and there is clear allocation of responsibility for library liaison within a given area. Library budgets are sometimes devolved to curriculum areas. In 40 per cent of colleges, there is no systematic approach; links are informal, built on relationships at an individual or subject level, so that, for example, books for English thrive at the expense of geography. Many students benefit from subject resource centres in which textbooks and subject-specific resources are located.

However, the items they hold are commonly not recorded on the college library catalogue, thus reducing their general availability to students and leading, in some instances, to duplication.

91 Where library provision is good, there are generous opening hours, appropriate holdings of books and periodicals, a high level of support for students undertaking project work, a range of CD-ROM materials, a friendly and welcoming atmosphere, adequate space for private study, the availability of facilities for viewing tapes, and a cuttings service. However, there is a significant number of colleges in which library provision is unsatisfactory: the bookstock uneven, resources poorly managed and facilities for private study inadequate.

92 The development of forms of learning in which students work on their own using specially-designed resources is accelerating, brought about by a mixture of funding pressures, curriculum changes, college policy and individual or departmental initiatives. Most learning of this kind is developed centrally. In some colleges, it is supplemented by subject-specific workshops or resource centres. Good practice is particularly evident in English, modern foreign languages, sociology, psychology and geography. Where staff are committed, and students are given adequate direction and support in their use, the resources in these centres make a significant contribution to students' learning.

> Geography staff in the department have produced a collection of resource packs for students, built around topics. Each pack contains a study plan, associated sources of reading, articles and other relevant data, including CD-ROM disks. A set of proposed tasks is also included. These packs are available in the college library and also in the departmental resource base.

93 Teachers are making increasing use of computerised information systems to support students' learning. Systems such as CD-ROMs, computerised software packages and, in a few cases, access to information highways such as the Internet are developing rapidly.

They are welcome additions to traditional information sources, proving particularly valuable in widening students' access to information, supporting research, fostering students' ability to study on their own and developing keyboard and other skills of value both in employment and higher education. Traditionally, humanities subjects have been important in helping students develop the key skills of information retrieval and analysis; these new resources require teachers to ensure that students receive effective induction and guidance in their use.

Accommodation

94 Most accommodation for humanities teaching is of an adequate standard, providing a pleasant learning environment for students. In some instances, it is excellent. The overall quality of accommodation is inadequate in about a quarter of the colleges inspected. In particular, some of the annexes used for humanities classes and some of the rooms occupied by part-time students provide poor accommodation for teaching and learning. Occasionally, the small size of the classroom restricts the range of learning activities. About 10 per cent of the unsatisfactory accommodation consists of elderly temporary accommodation. English, history, sociology and access to higher education courses are most likely to be taught in mobile classrooms. However, humanities teaching overall does not suffer a disproportionate use of this type of accommodation and there are examples of humanities teachers using such accommodation effectively to provide stimulating learning environments. A total of 85 per cent of colleges say their accommodation for humanities is as good as it is for other programme areas.

95 In 40 per cent of colleges, teaching takes place in rooms dedicated to a specific subject, allowing easy access to relevant teaching materials and good use of display areas. In other colleges, sympathetic timetabling allows subjects to be taught in certain rooms for a set period of time each week. Some colleges have a policy that specifies that all non-specialist teaching areas are general teaching rooms and cannot be dedicated to particular courses and subjects.

Unless handled well, this often leads to dull, uninviting rooms, complications over storage and access to relevant teaching materials, and display areas that are either at a premium or neglected.

96 In some colleges, specialist suites of rooms are allocated to particular curriculum areas. These are usual now for modern foreign languages teaching. A growing number of colleges have impressive and up-to-date language centres. Specialist facilities are increasingly provided for English, communications and media studies, and for other areas as well, and these provide a strong sense of subject identity for students and staff, as well as a practical focus for the storage and exchange of ideas and materials. Humanities accommodation generally suffers from a shortage of staff and student work areas, and inadequate storage facilities. These are problems for about half the colleges, particularly where teaching areas are dispersed.

The outstanding displays include students' work, records of visits and exchanges, posters, photographs and all sorts of authentic materials associated with life abroad. These are complemented by teaching materials organised so that students can gain access to them without help. Many rooms have been personalised by the use of plants and there is even appropriate background music before and during lessons. 'Mini Europe' starts on the stairs leading up to the language suite!

GUIDANCE AND SUPPORT

Recruitment

97 Although there is little formal investigation of the reasons influencing humanities students' choice of subject or programme, those most often quoted are interest in, or enjoyment of, a particular subject and the relevance of the qualification for entry to higher education. In addition:

- subjects are sometimes selected for their novelty value or for the 'fresh start' they give; for example, psychology, American studies, government and politics
- many part-time students take up a subject for recreational purposes, and some as a way of easing themselves back into a more substantial programme of study; these students in particular do not welcome the increasing emphasis on examinations or qualifications
- modern foreign languages, more than most other humanities subjects, are seen by part-time adult students as a way of increasing the likelihood of finding work or working abroad
- some courses, such as the various teacher training courses, are related to particular careers; others, such as access courses, prepare students to progress to new levels of study
- choice is sometimes influenced by students' perceptions of the relative chances of success in different subjects; for example, humanities subjects are generally seen as easier than sciences and sociology easier than history.

98 To become a full-time student on a GCE A level programme of study, the standard entry requirement is at least four GCSE subjects at grade C or above. In as many as 25 per cent of colleges, it is five GCSEs. In a number of instances, students are expected to have at least a grade B in the subject they intend to study, though this is more common in sixth form colleges than in other colleges. In foreign languages, students are sometimes required to achieve grade A in the

language to be studied. Generally, GCSE English grades are seen as a good indicator of success in considering students for entry to humanities subjects.

99 There is evidence that colleges are raising their entry requirements, often in response to performance tables and to funding arrangements that reward successful completion. Some colleges that previously claimed to have few or no formal requirements for entry to GCE A levels have now changed their policy. Students not meeting requirements are directed towards more appropriate provision. Colleges are also increasingly stringent about allowing students in difficulty to proceed with their studies; they are introducing systems to identify these students as early as possible in their course and before they proceed to the second year. This is already having an impact on recruitment and retention in particular subjects. For example, in one college, a group of 13 modern language students was reduced to six at the end of the first year. It is too early to say what impact this increased stringency will have on levels of achievement.

100 Entry requirements for adults and part-time students are much more flexible; often there are no formal requirements at all. The expansion of provision for those without any formal qualifications means that colleges are having to find alternative ways of ensuring that students are embarking on the right course of study and at the right level. Some of the considerable wastage that can occur in the early stages of part-time courses, particularly those running in the evening, reflects inappropriate enrolment policies. Students commented that by the time they had discovered their course was unsuitable it was often too late to start another one. Nevertheless, the early drop out is often counterbalanced by the levels of success achieved by those highly-motivated students who stay to complete the course.

101 There are some examples of humanities students gaining accreditation for their prior learning or other relevant experience, but these are few in number. One general further education college offers accreditation of prior achievement in GNVQ language modules;

another for core units. It is at its most developed on access courses, where some accreditation is possible for mature students in about 15 per cent of colleges.

Induction Programmes

102 Nearly all colleges now provide an induction programme for students, though these vary considerably in duration and content. For full-time humanities students, a typical programme might provide: a general introduction to the college, its policies, structures and facilities, lasting perhaps one or two days; an introduction to the procedures, systems, and staff supporting the programme of study, for example the GCE A level or access programme, again lasting one or two days; and an introduction to the subject itself. Induction to the subject is minimal in some cases where staff believe that students are eager to begin 'real' work straightaway. In the majority of cases, it lasts from a week to six weeks and the time is used to consolidate previous learning, fill in any gaps, introduce the subject or the course, and to confirm the choice. In a minority of instances, the induction programme is devised so that it is common to a number of subjects or programmes of study, to allow the students to move from one subject, level or course to another with the minimum of difficulty. There are a few examples where the first term of a GCE A level programme forms a general preparation for the main syllabus work which begins in term two; some areas of future study are introduced but the focus is on developing appropriate background knowledge and learning techniques.

103 Teachers continue to report that school leavers find the transition to GCE A level difficult to handle, perhaps because GCSE has been substantially redesigned while GCE A levels remain largely the same. Humanities staff are paying increasing attention to the development of bridging courses designed to help students develop the new skills required, to support them in coping with different teaching approaches and to deal with gaps in knowledge.

Tutorial Support

104 In common with the sector as a whole, tutorial systems and procedures for supporting and monitoring the progress of full-time humanities students are increasingly effective. In the best practice, these systems have also been extended to part-time students. Humanities students usually have a weekly timetabled tutorial and scheduled reviews of progress leading to the establishing of individual action plans which involve them in setting their own learning objectives.

105 In more than three-quarters of colleges, full-time humanities students are encouraged to keep a record of achievement, usually as part of the review process and as a way of capturing those additional developments and experiences that lie outside their qualification aims. However, there is some evidence that the use of records of achievement is less widespread with humanities students than it is with students in vocational areas. Where records of achievement are optional, students' interest in them often drops dramatically; sometimes as few as 20 per cent maintain their records. This may reflect the fact that candidates attending for interview at universities report that admissions tutors take little interest in records of achievement.

106 Careers guidance for humanities students is generally good, especially in relation to progression to higher education. Teachers and tutors spend much time and energy providing advice and helping students prepare their applications. However, teachers' advice does not always reach beyond the immediate goal to deal with wider career aspirations. As a result, some students still find themselves taking inappropriate subjects or combinations at university that will not enable them to follow their chosen career. For example, students may take a social sciences course in the mistaken expectation that it will give them direct entry to professions which involve working with people. This can be a particular problem for mature students, especially women returning to study and those on access courses.

Learning Support

107 In the past, screening for literacy and numeracy was infrequent in sixth form colleges; where it did exist in other colleges, GCE A level students were often excluded from it. This situation is now changing rapidly. In 70 per cent of general further education and tertiary colleges, all full-time students are now screened at entry as part of the induction process. Screening is less developed for part-time students, who in practice would often benefit from the additional support to which this could lead. There is still little evidence of systematic screening of GCE A level students in sixth form colleges, though it is becoming more prevalent for GCSE and GNVQ students. Colleges have found that screening serves a useful purpose. For example, one tertiary college has established that 30 per cent of its adult foundation level students require additional literacy support, and a general further education college has found a similar level of need among humanities students as a whole. Not all colleges deal adequately with this important aspect of provision.

Subject Support

108 The majority of colleges in the sector have well-developed and effective academic support systems to identify and help students who are experiencing difficulties with their programmes of study. Colleges are increasingly developing learning centres to offer specific help in subject areas, for example, drop-in English workshops or language centres. Some students choose to use these facilities; others are referred by their subject teachers. A number of colleges provides support for high achievers. For example, there are extra classes providing in-depth studies of particular aspects of the curriculum, and stringent learning targets and reviews of progress against expectations.

109 Adequate development of study skills is seen as an important element for adults returning to study. For humanities students, it is important in helping them make a successful transition from GCSE to GCE A levels. Colleges increasingly acknowledge that many students

who have achieved grade C in four or five GCSE subjects still need considerable support if they are to achieve good grades at GCE A level. However, the teaching of study skills often lacks co-ordination; some skills are over-taught while others are not addressed at all. There should be more staff development to enable teachers to provide students with the study skills required for their particular subject.

110 The development of core skills in communication, numeracy and information technology is not a strength within the humanities programme area, particularly at advanced levels of study. It is often assumed that literacy and communication can be taken for granted, or that they will be developed automatically through exposure to humanities subjects. While this may be so for many students, it is far from the case for all, particularly where a college has significantly extended its intake to cater for a wide range of ability. An honourable exception is access provision, where the development of core skills often forms a significant part of the learning programme.

111 In general, there is little provision within this programme area which is specifically designed to meet the needs of students with learning difficulties and/or disabilities. Many colleges run courses for this group which fall within FEFC programme area 10, and humanities staff often contribute to these courses, particularly the elements on communications and modern languages. However, wherever possible, students join part-time or full-time mainstream humanities courses and have access to additional support to help meet their particular requirements.

EXTERNAL INFLUENCES ON THE PROGRAMME AREA

Examining Bodies

112 Much of the programme area's curriculum is determined by the six major examination boards. The boards are independent businesses, working in competition with one another to provide GCE, GCSE and other syllabuses and to organise assessment, marking and moderation procedures for their examinations. In addition, an increasing number of national and regional examining bodies offer more specialised examinations, often targeted at specific groups, for example, C&G and RSA at national level and the Open College Network and the Northern Council for Further Education at regional or local level.

113 The examining bodies, large and small, continue to exert a considerable influence on the humanities programme area through their management of syllabuses and monitoring of standards and assessment procedures. However, the traffic is not all one way. There is an increasing requirement for variety in syllabuses and models of assessment to cater for the widening range of students in the sector, and boards have recognised the need to be responsive to their customers in order to maintain their customer base and viability. Within the last decade, dissatisfaction with particular syllabuses or shifts in students' interests have stimulated much closer collaboration between the boards and their customers. Most colleges express satisfaction over their recent dealings with examining bodies although they would welcome more encouragement for students to use information technology.

114 Contact between examining bodies and college staff can take a number of forms. New syllabuses often arise from consultation with practitioners and are then drafted by subject committees which include teacher representatives. The launch or re-launch of syllabuses or assessment procedures is normally accompanied by a series of

information giving or training events for potential users, allowing opportunities for direct two-way communication. Teaching staff may be members of local consortia set up to moderate marking of coursework. Moderators and examiners pay regular visits to colleges, enabling them to comment directly on the standards and appropriateness of what they see, as well as giving staff the opportunity to provide feedback to the examining body. Indeed, the chief examiners, examiners and moderators who give the examining bodies much of their credibility include many staff from sector colleges. In the humanities programme area, it is not unusual for as many as 20 per cent or more of staff to be involved in one way or another in external examining or moderating.

Links with Schools

115 Although schools are by far the main source of full-time students and although many of the humanities subjects taught in colleges are also taught in schools, colleges' subject links with schools are often limited. Wherever possible, colleges work hard to maintain good links with local schools for recruitment purposes but curricular links remain underdeveloped, to the detriment of students' continuity of learning. Where there is little competition for students, some sixth form colleges, in particular, are able to make good use of their historical links with schools. However, half the general further education colleges surveyed had no curricular links with schools. Where good practice does exist, it is often dependent on individual college staff and their school counterparts; it is unusual to find a systematic approach to the development of effective links for all the subjects in the programme area which a college offers. College managers and staff often comment on the loss to the sector of the LEA's contribution to fostering such contacts, either directly or through their advisory services.

116 The range of curricular links found during inspections includes the following examples of good practice:

- subject-based groups, sponsored by the college or schools, or continuing from earlier liaison activities; for example, a teachers' local history group
- college staff teaching in schools, or vice-versa, sometimes on the basis of a direct exchange
- 'taster' days and subject workshops held for 15- and 16-year-old pupils
- schools having access to specialist college facilities, such as a television studio
- collaboration over minority subjects, for example, those not usually available in schools, such as psychology, or not available in the college, such as classical languages
- colleges acting as an examination centre for courses of study followed in the school.

117 Modern foreign language teachers in the college and schools often develop successful links through:

- joint field trips or exchanges
- consortium arrangements to share language teaching and maintain minority languages
- shared teaching and the sharing of language assistants
- increasing provision of language classes for 11 to 16 schools; and in some instances, primary schools.

118 Staff in at least 80 per cent of humanities departments spoke positively of the beneficial and continuing impact of the technical and vocational educational initiative. One college, for example, described it as 'the most successful initiative for a long time, with many of its practices now firmly embedded'. Humanities teachers identified its considerable contribution to curriculum development, particularly in relation to: the range of teaching and learning methods, including more flexible forms of learning; the use and availability of information

technology; and increased understanding and use of tutorial support systems, including records of achievement and action plans. Although funding has ceased, individual contacts and some consortia meetings continue.

119 A key aspect of working with schools is the need for humanities staff to be fully prepared for the impact of the national curriculum and the changes in provision still working their way through. College teachers' knowledge of these varies; it is sometimes barely adequate but generally stronger in sixth form colleges than in general further education colleges. Occasionally, school staff come into colleges to brief their further education colleagues. Humanities staff in the colleges identify a number of changes which they perceive to result from the introduction of the national curriculum. These are:

- a more limited range of subjects available in schools means that students are increasingly opting for subjects without prior knowledge of them; this has implications for student recruitment, induction and the opportunities which exist for students to change courses in the early stages of a programme
- colleges are increasingly experimenting with subjects not included in the national curriculum, offering these as GCSEs or GCE A levels in order to attract students
- no consensus has yet emerged about the impact of the national curriculum on modern foreign languages; at present, more students are opting for German, which goes some way to counterbalance the traditional dominance of French, but there is some uncertainty as to whether this will be a lasting trend. Colleges report fewer students taking two languages and there is concern about the impact the proposed short courses will have on progression to GCE A level
- some colleges report an increasing demand for history and geography as a result of shifts in the national curriculum, while others report a decrease. Fewer students now take both subjects

- the skills in information technology which students acquired in school are inadequately used in college humanities programmes. Such skills are frequently not extended and all too often they are neither used nor maintained. Teachers identify the requirements of the examining bodies as a restricting factor, but other reasons, such as lack of facilities and lack of appropriate staff skills, are also relevant.

120 Recent changes in GCSE have had their impact on the teaching of humanities. GCSE coursework has proved popular with students, and colleges continue to seek out syllabuses with coursework options, despite the restrictions recently introduced. School leavers are seen as having better research and coursework skills; some staff also report that students have a better overview of subjects and are more likely to be able to draw on knowledge from one area of work to support another; for example, to use a relevant historical background to inform their studies in literature.

Links with Local Colleges and Higher Education Establishments

121 Links with neighbouring colleges are often adversely affected by a concern for maintaining competitive advantage at the expense of co-operation. However, there are exceptions. Some colleges have formed consortia, and individual staff often develop effective informal and personal links. Colleges sometimes find it easier to develop contacts with colleges outside their immediate locality; a number of colleges now have more contact with higher education providers than with neighbouring sector colleges.

122 Liaison between sector colleges and higher education institutions varies in focus as well as effectiveness. General further education and tertiary colleges often have substantial links, mainly to do with the development of provision; for example, the development of access courses, the franchising of first or second years of degree courses, or systems of credit accumulation which allow students to omit parts of

courses or to progress directly to the second year. Such provision is often well developed within a particular locality. Higher education links with sixth form colleges are focused more on curriculum enhancement and progression than the development of provision; for example, they take the form of recruitment fairs, 'taster' days and summer schools.

123 A number of colleges have developed collaborative arrangements with higher education institutions to encourage students who might not otherwise consider entry to higher education. Participating institutions commit themselves to giving favourable consideration to applications from these students. For example, an inner city college has successfully increased participation in this way, particularly among minority ethnic groups. A further interesting development offered by at least one college is the extension of access provision to 16 to 19 year olds who underachieve at school but still wish to progress to higher education.

Links with Employers and TECs

124 For the humanities programme area, links with the world of work are less substantial than in any other programme area. The majority of sixth form colleges and a quarter of general further education and tertiary colleges in the survey reported that their humanities staff have no direct contact with employers or TECs, or else they have links which are in the very early stages of development. In sixth form colleges, links are largely to do with enhancing individual students' experience, for example, through: the provision of relevant work experience; young enterprise schemes and careers talks; or work-based curriculum projects for students, such as the preparation of tourist leaflets or analysis of data. In general further education colleges, contacts are primarily to do with the development of full-cost provision and 75 per cent of colleges say that their humanities provision makes some contribution to full-cost provision. This most typically involves the provision of language training, particularly, though not always, for larger companies.

One college applied for European Union funding to deliver language training to local companies. This resulted in nine companies taking up the offer of up to 30 hours free language tuition, involving 81 learners, two languages and assessment in the workplace for some of the students.

125 Colleges also run courses or workshops on report writing or presentation skills and a growing area of activity is the provision of training for employers enabling them to become assessors and verifiers for vocational awards. Many humanities staff in sixth form colleges see little potential for generating income, or do not see it as part of their mission. There are notable exceptions; for example, a sixth form college delivers a full-cost personal development course at a local school and a number are moving substantially into recreational or other adult provision.

Links with Europe and Overseas

126 Colleges are increasingly committed to working with Europe and countries further afield such as the United States of America, Russia and those in the Far East. Some of these links are to do with accessing sources of funding; for example, attracting overseas students or tapping into various European Union funds. In the humanities programme area, the main focus is on Europe and the main purpose of such links is the enrichment of students' learning.

127 Colleges that offer a significant number of GCE A level subjects often have long-standing links with educational institutions in other countries. These were originally established to provide group or individual exchanges for language students and staff in order to further the study of the languages concerned and to provide an insight into different cultures. In a small number of cases, language students undertake work experience abroad. In one large college of further education which has a strong commitment to community languages, the teacher of Urdu organised a Europe-wide conference at the college with a view to establishing a European network for teachers of Urdu.

128 Teachers and students of subjects other than languages are also increasingly involved in these activities. Geography students make field study trips to France or Germany, students of modern history visit Poland and students of medieval history visit Normandy. In a small number of instances, such links are strengthened by the use of information technology, such as fax, e-mail and jointly-held databases. One college has built on its links with a college in the south of France to develop a joint database for history and geography. Adult and access students are increasingly involved in such activities. One college is using European funding to provide training opportunities for women returners which involve student exchanges with Spain, Italy and France.

129 Language staff often provide short introductory courses in a foreign language to prepare students on vocational courses for study visits, some of which are sponsored by the local TEC. One large college of food, tourism and creative studies has extensive overseas links with a number of countries, including Cyprus and Tunisia, and this has enabled about 1,100 students over the years to participate in overseas work placements and other foreign visits.

130 A number of colleges report that planned exchange and study visits have failed to materialise because of the poor response from students. Such arrangements often depend for their success on the prevailing college culture in terms of its commitment, both financial and attitudinal, to fostering contact with Europe. A number of colleges now have an explicit and active commitment to promote European awareness, often leading to the inclusion of European elements in all programmes of study. Such colleges are often working in a number of partnerships with a range of colleges in different countries, sometimes as the leading partner. In colleges such as these, the variety of active links at all levels is often impressive and students comment positively on the opportunities they have to benefit from them.

ROLE OF HUMANITIES PROVISION IN THE SECTOR

131 The humanities programme area contains an extensive and varied range of provision which shares a focus on human, cultural and social activities and a similar methodology. Although some subjects may be regarded as broadly vocational, the programme area is generally regarded as the most academic of the FEFC's 10 programme areas. Compared with other programme areas, there is little evidence that it is looked at in terms of strategic considerations: its nature and purpose within the sector, or the precise nature of the contribution that humanities makes to the individual, to society or to the economy. Universities, the professions and industry use phrases like 'the well-rounded individual' to describe the typical humanities student; successful students are considered likely to be 'adaptable' and 'lifelong learners'. The programme area has a significant contribution to make to the achievement of one of the foundation learning national targets for education and training: namely, the development of 'self-reliance, flexibility and breadth'.

132 A humanities qualification is valued both in its own right and as an indicator of potential. In addition to its own knowledge base, colleges see it as providing:

- a greater understanding of life, times, places, roles and responsibilities
- the development of a personal as well as an intellectual dimension to learning; the sharpening of the emotions and ability to empathise
- greater cultural and aesthetic awareness and enjoyment
- opportunities to exercise judgement, to make informed choices and to tolerate ambiguity in the absence of absolutes
- opportunities to develop interpersonal skills and personal effectiveness

- essential skills such as the ability to communicate effectively in both writing and speech; to marshal thoughts and present arguments.

133 However, the rationale underlining the value of humanities programmes of study is in general better explored and more explicit in other developed countries, such as Canada, France, Germany and the United States of America, where it continues to play an important part in educational provision at least until the age of 18. More could be done to identify the particular contribution made by humanities to individual and national development.

CONCLUSIONS AND ISSUES

134 The strengths of humanities provision are that:

- it continues to attract and meet the needs of large numbers of students from a wide range of backgrounds
- it successfully promotes the skills and habits of individual thought, understanding, judgement and communication
- it contributes to the achievement of the qualification aims of the national targets for education and training, especially the target relating to self-reliance, flexibility and breadth
- it embraces an extensive and varied range of subjects, offering students a choice of level, content and mode of attendance and the possibility of integrating the academic and the vocational
- it includes a significant element of provision which successfully meets the needs of mature students and those from groups who have not, in the past, participated in further education
- it provides clearly identified and well-supported routes to higher levels of study, both for school leavers and for mature students

- teachers are highly qualified, experienced and committed to their subjects and to the well-being and progress of their students
- classroom teaching is among the most effective in the sector, and humanities students speak positively about their studies
- the majority of students meet their primary aim, which is to achieve progression to higher education
- many colleges have well-developed, effective systems for providing support to students experiencing difficulties
- students frequently demonstrate levels of achievement in GCE A level subjects that are good and often excellent, particularly in relation to their levels of qualification at entry
- equipment and accommodation are generally sufficient to provide an appropriate learning environment.

135 A number of issues need to be addressed if humanities provision is to maintain and strengthen its contribution to the sector:

- the lack of clarity about the nature and role of humanities provision means that its contribution to individuals, the sector and society often passes unrecognised
- some colleges are experiencing increasing difficulty in maintaining sufficient breadth of provision to meet students' needs
- structures for managing humanities provision within colleges are not always effective
- in a minority of sessions teachers fail to cater adequately for the increasingly wide range of abilities and educational backgrounds of their students
- there is considerable variation in levels of achievement, and insufficient attention is paid to analysing the reasons and identifying appropriate action
- on some GCSE courses, poor student motivation and weak teaching have led to problems of attendance, retention and achievement

- teachers do not make enough use of audio-visual aids and information technology
- systems for recruiting, guiding and supporting part-time students are often inadequate, leading to substantial and early withdrawal from courses
- part-time teachers often receive insufficient support and information, and they are not always managed or deployed to best effect
- library bookstock is often uneven in coverage, out of date and inadequately managed
- curriculum links with schools, higher education and industry are under-developed.

DETAILS OF ADDITIONAL ACTIVITIES SUPPORTING THE SURVEY

Table 1. Analysis of teaching sessions observed by inspectors, by subject

Subject groupings	*Number of teaching sessions analysed*
English and communications	178
Modern foreign languages	133
Sociology	81
Psychology	64
History/government and politics	88
Geography/environmental studies	31
English as a foreign language	31
Other subjects	80
Total	**686**

Table 2. Number of colleges participating in the survey by type of institution and FEFC region

Region	*No. of colleges*	*SFC**	*Tertiary*	*GFEC†*
Eastern Region	8	2	4	2
East Midlands	5	1	0	4
Greater London	10	3	1	6
Northern Region	4	2	0	2
North West	7	3	2	2
South East	4	2	1	1
South West	5	0	2	3
West Midlands	3	2	0	1
Yorkshire and Humberside	5	2	1	2
Total	**51**	**17**	**11**	**23**

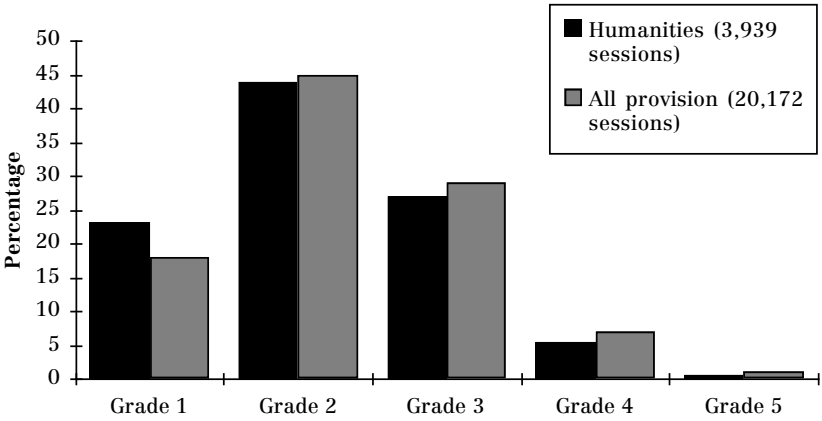
***** *SFC: sixth form college* **†** *GFEC: general further education college*

PROGRAMME AREA 9

Humanities (including education and social studies)

Academic studies in education
American studies
Anthropology
Archaeology
Celtic languages
Classics
Combined or general arts
Communication studies
Comparative literature
Economic and social history
Economics
Education for those with special needs
English (not including ESOL, literacy)
French, German, Italian, Spanish, Portuguese, Latin American languages, Scandinavian languages, Russian
Geography
History
History of Art
Law
Librarianship
Linguistics
Management and organisation of education
Other ancient languages
Other combined or general courses (including GCE A level general studies)
Other social studies (including women's studies)
Other topics in education
Philosophy
Physical education (not including sports studies/science)
Politics (except public administration)
Psychology
Slavonic and eastern European languages, other European languages, Chinese, Japanese, other Asian languages, modern Middle Eastern languages, African languages, other language studies, other general modern languages
Social policy and administration
Sociology
Techniques in teaching adults
Techniques in teaching children
Technology in education
Theology and religious studies

DISTRIBUTION OF INSPECTION GRADES AWARDED TO TEACHING SESSIONS: A COMPARISON OF HUMANITIES WITH ALL CURRICULUM AREAS



Source: inspectorate database 1 May 1996

Grade Descriptors

Grade 1 *Provision which has many strengths and very few weaknesses*

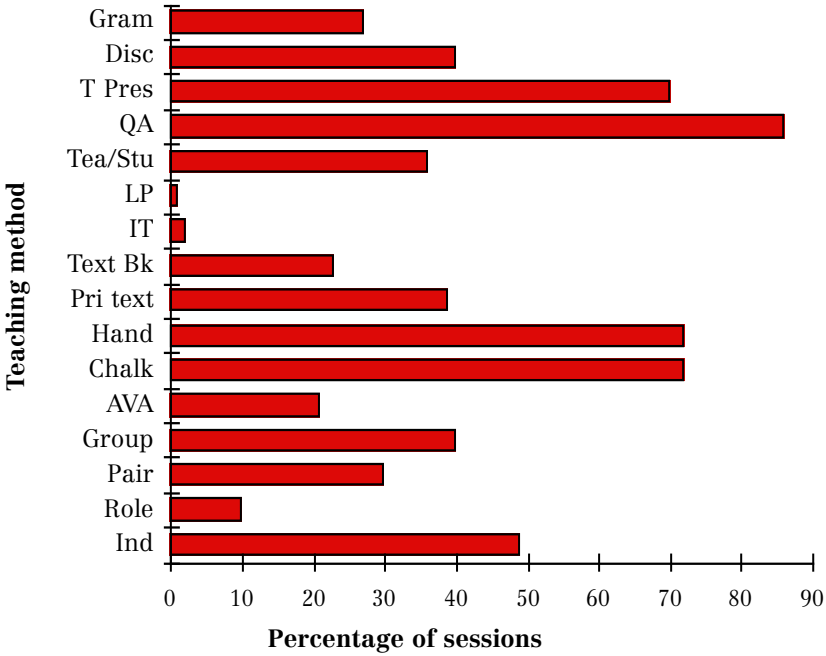
Grade 2 *Provision in which the strengths clearly outweigh the weaknesses*

Grade 3 *Provision with a balance of strengths and weaknesses*

Grade 4 *Provision in which the weaknesses clearly outweigh the strengths*

Grade 5 *Provision which has many weaknesses and very few strengths.*

FREQUENCY OF TEACHING METHODS USED IN HUMANITIES SESSIONS



Key

Gram	Grammar corrected
Disc	Discussion
T Pres	Teacher exposition
QA	Question and answer session
Tea/Stu	One-to-one interaction between teacher and student
LP	Use of learning packages
IT	Use of computers
Text Bk	Use of text books
Pri text	Use of printed text
Hand	Use of handouts
Chalk	Chalk and talk
AVA	Use of visual aids
Group	Work in groups
Pair	Work in pairs
Role	Role-play
Ind	Individual work

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Spine

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